

Sūrah Nās

Central Theme

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah Falaq, the previous *sūrah* and there is no essential difference between the central themes of the two. Both are a means through which a person seeks the Almighty's protection from various evils. However, there are certain aspects which distinguish this *sūrah* from the previous one:

Firstly, in this *sūrah*, refuge is sought with Allah through His attributes which are directly related to man. As a result, the appeal of the *sūrah* is more effective. The previous *sūrah* also carries an effective appeal, yet it is more argumentative in style. In this *sūrah*, on the other hand, this style, though present, is overshadowed by repeated earnest calls which invoke Allah's mercy.

Secondly, in the previous *sūrah*, refuge is sought from various evils, while this *sūrah* seeks protection against Satan, the root of all evils and, as indicated in the previous *sūrah*, the eternal enemy of *tawhīd*.

Thirdly, in the previous *sūrah*, Satan is referred to with regard to one of his characteristics – jealousy. In this *sūrah*, his method and technique, his clan and accomplices, the sphere of his incursions and onslaughts, all are brought to light so that people have a clear perception of their shrewd enemy and are in a position to defend themselves.

Text and Translation

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ (١) مَلِكِ النَّاسِ (٢) إِلَهِ النَّاسِ (٣) مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ (٤)
الَّذِي يُوسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ (٥) مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ (٦)

Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind, the Emperor of mankind, the God of mankind from the mischief of the prompter who withdraws after his prompts, who implants evil suggestions in the hearts of men, and is from among the jinn and men.

Explanation

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ (١) مَلِكِ النَّاسِ (٢) إِلَهِ النَّاسِ (٣)¹

These opening verses seek refuge with Allah through three attributes, which, in fact, also determine the basic rights of Allah imposed on man. They guide us moreover that help should only be solicited from someone who possesses such attributes.

How the attributes stated above ascertain these basic rights can be understood if one appreciates that it is only befitting for someone who is the Cherisher of mankind to be their real Emperor, and it is only befitting for someone who is the real Emperor of mankind to have the right to be worshipped. It is certainly against all norms of sense to worship and regard someone who is not the real cherisher of mankind their real emperor and, therefore, such practice has been totally forbidden.

In Sūrah Fātiḥah, it is stated that since it is the Almighty Who is the Cherisher of His creation, all thanksgivings must return to Him, and He alone should be worshipped and sought help from. What the opening three verses of this *sūrah* imply is no different.

An acceptance of the above three attributes closes all doors which lead to polytheism, and an acknowledgement of one of them necessitates the acknowledgement of the others.

مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ (٤)²

This verse states the real entity from which refuge is sought in the above verses. Though it is not stated in words, yet it is quite evident from the attributes mentioned and the specification made later that it is Satan who is referred to.

The verse describes Satan's technique and his line of attack: he allures people through propaganda and deceptive promises and by initiating wicked suggestions in their minds. After entrapping them, he acquits himself of all the consequences and enjoys watching the ill-fated foolish who get caught by his sinister schemes.

There is no conjunction between *وَسْوَاسٍ* (prompter of evil) and *خَنَّاسٍ* (one who withdraws) which means that these two characteristics exist simultaneously in the noun they qualify.

It is quite evident from this verse that Satan's only weapon is prompting evil suggestions. Apart from this, he has no other powers through which he may necessarily lead a person astray. He tries to frighten as well as to cajole people through threatening admonitions and

1. Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind, the Emperor of mankind, the God of mankind.

2. From the mischief of the prompter who withdraws after his prompts.

sugar-coated promises, but he cannot harm people who are not over-awed by him. Therefore, when he had threatened the Almighty that he would lead mankind astray, the Almighty had clearly replied:

إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ (٦٥:١٧)

[Do whatever you can,] You will have no power over my people [who intend to remain on the right path]. (17:65)

He also assured His creation that He would certainly help those who would repose all their confidence in Him and counteract the assaults of Satan:

وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ وَكِيلًا (٦٥:١٧)

Your Lord suffices as [your] Guardian. (17:65)

The adjective خَنَّاسٍ (*khannās*) delineates another aspect of Satan's character. Commentators have generally regarded it to mean someone who prompts evil suggestions while remaining hidden from people. This meaning can only be accepted if Satan and his allies are regarded as jinn, but the last verse clearly points out that these evil creatures exist both in men and in the jinn-folk. Some other commentators have understood it to mean "someone who comes again and again," which has no basis in the Arabic language.

In the opinion of this writer, it means "someone who withdraws and retreats." This actually brings out a typical feature of Satan's mode of attack. Initially, he comes out and entices his prey, and when a person succumbs to his wicked suggestions, he acquits himself of all the consequences. This very character of Satan is also depicted at various instances in the Qur'ān. In Sūrah Furqān, he is called خَذُول (khadhūl), that is "one who deceives his followers":

وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِلْإِنْسَانِ خَذُولًا (٢٩:٢٥)

And Satan is the deceiver of men. (25:29)

To quote Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl:

وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا (٦٤:١٧)

All of Satan's promises are mere deception. (17:64)

Sūrah Ḥaṣhr portrays this aspect of Satan's character even more

clearly:

كَمَثَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِذْ قَالَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ اكْفُرْ فَلَمَّا كَفَرَ قَالَ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّنكَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ
اللَّهَ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ (١٦:٥٩)

They are like Satan, when he says to man: disbelieve. When he disbelieves, he says to him: I here and now disown you, I fear Allah, the Lord of the Worlds. (59:16)

The Jews had demonstrated this Satanic character at the time of the battle of Badr. They had induced the Quraysh to attack Madīnah by giving them the assurance that the Muslims would not be able to face them, and if need be, they themselves would come forward and assist them. However, as history bears witness, they never turned up in the battlefield. The Qur'ān has depicted this character as follows:

وَإِذْ زَيْنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ وَقَالَ لَا غَالِبَ لَكُمُ الْيَوْمَ مِنَ النَّاسِ وَإِنِّي جَارٌ
لَّكُمْ فَلَمَّا تَرَأَتِ الْفِئَتَانِ نَكَصَ عَلَى عَقَبَيْهِ وَقَالَ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّنْكُمْ إِنِّي أَرَى مَا
لَا تَرَوْنَ (٤٨:٨)

And when Satan [Jews] made their [the Quraysh's] deeds seem fair to them and said: Today no man shall overcome you, and I shall be with you. But when the two forces faced each other, he took to his heels saying: I am done with you; I see what you do not. (8:48)

Not only Satan and his followers exhibit this very character in this world, they will also do so in the next. The Qur'ān, on a number of occasions, has drawn a picture of the dialogue that will take place in Hell between evil leaders and their followers. These adherents will ask the leaders, whom they had so diligently followed, to come forward and help them. The leaders will reply that it was their fault that they had followed them, for they had never forced them to do so; therefore, they should now face the punishment themselves.

The word خَنَّاسٍ (*khannās*) is meant to express the above mentioned feature of Satan's character and actually sounds a warning to everyone: People should not be overwhelmed by his sweet talk; rather they should always keep in mind his disloyalty and betrayals when a person falls prey to his 'word of honour'.

الَّذِي يُوسُّوسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ (٥) مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ (٦)³

The above stated verses indicate Satan's mission as well as his brethren's so that people can have a clear perception of their enemy. His modus operandi is to prompt evil suggestions in a person's bosom. Here, the word صُدُورٍ (chest) actually implies a person's heart which is contained in his chest. These evil suggestions are of course meant to divert a man from the right path. Satan himself has stated this to be his mission as specified by the Qur'ān at various places. He has no other authority or hold on man and cannot forcibly lead him astray, as mentioned earlier.

The words مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ ([and is] from among the jinn and men) specify Satan's brethren, indicating that he is not an independent creation of Allah, but every one among the jinn and men who induces evil suggestions in others' hearts is, in fact, a Satan. The Qur'ān has specified that the Satan who had inveigled Adam was from among the jinn. It is incorrect to regard this particular Satan as an independent or eternal creation. However, his mission will be carried on till the Day of Judgement through his disciples and followers who are from both men and the jinn folk.

With these words the exegesis of this *sūrah* ends, which ends *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* as well. I, as a humble servant, am extremely grateful to the Almighty for being able to be of some service to the cause of truth. I pray to Him to make this work a means of my salvation in the Hereafter, to make every rightly interpreted verse a source of benefit for others, and to protect everyone from the evils of an erroneous inference. اللَّهُمَّ ارنا الحق حقاً وارزقنا اتباعه وارنا الباطل باطلاً وارزقنا اجتنابه وأخرد عوانا ان الحمد لله رب العلمين (O Allah! Show us the right path the way it is and make us follow it, and O Allah! Show us the wrong path the way it is and keep us away from it; Our final statement is that all gratitude is to God, the Lord of the worlds). (Amen)

3. Who implants evil suggestions in the hearts of man, and is from among the jinn and the men.